

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED IN THE

CHAPEL OF THE UNIVERSITY AT CAMBRIDGE,

NOVEMBER 5, 1817.

BY LEVI FRISBIE, A.M.


ALFORD PROFESSOR OF NATURAL RELIGION, MORAL PHILOSOPHY, AND
CIVIL POLITY IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

CAMBRIDGE :

PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS,

By Hilliard & Metcalf.

1817.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

NOTICE.

THE HON. JOHN ALFORD of Charlestown, Massachusetts, a gentleman of considerable estate, and highly respected in his publick and private character, died in the year 1761. In his last will, after a number of legacies to his relations and others, he bequeathed the remainder of his property to pious and charitable uses at the discretion of his executors, the Hon. Edmund Trowbridge, Esq. and Richard Cary, Esq. Exception being taken to the will by the heirs at law, after several trials before the Judge of Probate, and while an appeal to the Governour and Council was yet pending, a composition being recommended, the parties, for the regulation of their conduct therein, desired the Hon. Thomas Hutchinson, Thomas Hubbard and James Russell, Esquires, and Jeremy Gridley and James Otis, Esquires, to favour them with their opinion. These gentlemen, after due consideration, unanimously advised to a composition, and that after the payment of the debts of the testator, and the specifick legacies in the will, the remaining estate, being divided into *ten* parts, should be distributed; six tenths among his heirs and relations; and the other four tenth parts be applied to such pious and charitable uses as the executors, after proper consultation, should think most fit and useful. The parties aforesaid, having duly considered this opinion, concluded and agreed to determine the said appeal, and all matters in dispute, in the manner recommended.

The executors, finding that Colonel Alford, in certain former wills, had bequeathed largely to the propagation of the gospel among the Indians, to Harvard College, and to

the college in New Jersey, where the greater part of his estates lay, determined, reserving a small part for particular pious uses, to distribute the four tenths aforesaid in manner following : namely, one third part to Harvard College, one third part to the college in New Jersey, and one third part for the propagation of the gospel among the Indians.

In the year 1789, the executors appropriated the sum, which they had reserved and paid to the college, to a Professorship of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy and Civil Polity. The instrument which they executed for this purpose is herewith printed :

‘ Know all men, that whereas we, Edmund Trowbridge of Cambridge in the county of Middlesex, Esquire, and Richard Cary of Charlestown, in said county, Esquire, executors of the last will and testament of the Hon. John Alford, late of Charlestown aforesaid, Esquire, deceased, did at several times between the fifteenth day of March, anno domini seventeen hundred and sixty five, and the first day of June anno domini seventeen hundred and eighty two, put into the treasury of Harvard College in Cambridge, thirteen hundred and sixty two pounds, eight shillings and five pence, lawful money, part of the said Alford’s estate, to be by their treasurer let out and kept upon interest, and the growing interest added to the principal yearly, until such a capital should be raised, as that the interest thereof should be sufficient to support in said college, a professor of some particular science of publick utility, and then to be regularly appropriated to that use. And whereas, by reason of the late war, and the evils that attended it, this is not yet done, and there is no probability of such a capital being so raised during our lives,

‘ We do therefore now appropriate the said thirteen hundred and sixty two pounds, eight shillings and five pence, and the interest thereof in said treasury, to and for the support of a Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy and

Civil Polity in the said college forever, whose principal duty it shall be, by lectures and private instruction, to demonstrate the existence of a Deity or first cause, to prove and illustrate his essential attributes, both natural and moral ; to evince and explain his providence and government, together with the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments ; also to deduce and enforce the obligations which man is under to his Maker, and the duties which he owes him, resulting from the perfections of the Deity, and from his own rational nature, together with the most important duties of social life, resulting from the several relations which men mutually bear to each other ; and likewise the several duties which respect ourselves, founded not only in our own interest, but also in the will of God ; interspersing the whole with remarks, shewing the coincidence between the doctrines of revelation and the dictates of reason in these important points ; and lastly, notwithstanding this coincidence, to state the absolute necessity and vast utility of a divine revelation.

‘ He shall also read a distinct course of lectures upon that branch of Moral Philosophy, which respects the application of the law of nature to nations, and their relative rights and duties : and also on the absolute necessity of civil government in some form, and the reciprocal rights and duties of magistrates and of the people resulting from the social compact ; and also on the various forms of government, which have existed or may exist in the world, pointing out their respective advantages and disadvantages, and what form of government is best adapted to promote the greatest happiness of mankind.

‘ And to the end that a regular and systematical division of the foregoing subjects, and of all the other branches of science, which come under this institution, may be had and preserved, as well as a due proportion of time devoted to each, it is declared that the said Professor shall be under the control of the President, Fellows, and the Overseers

of the said college, who may, from time to time, give such directions relative thereto, as they shall judge fit and proper, and as shall be consistent with the rules and orders of this institution.

‘The said Professor shall read his lectures on Natural Religion to all the four classes of undergraduates. Those on Moral Philosophy to the two senior classes ; and those on Civil Polity to the senior class only, provided nevertheless, that the officers of the college, and resident graduates, as likewise such other gentlemen, as the corporation shall permit, shall have a right to attend all or any of the lectures aforementioned.

‘Such Professor shall be chosen by the President and Fellows, and approved by the Overseers of the said college, when there shall, in their judgment, be a sufficient fund for his support, raised either in the manner aforesaid, or for the present, with the assistance of the college or otherwise, until he can be properly supported in the manner first proposed.

‘But notwithstanding such temporary assistance, the said John Alford, Esquire, shall be deemed and considered as the founder of this Professorship, and the Professor shall be called the Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy and Civil Polity.

‘And we do hereby institute and appoint that the said Professor shall, from time to time, as occasion may require, be elected by the President and Fellows, and approved by the Overseers of said college, that he shall be a Master of Arts, and bear the character of a learned, pious, honest man—that he shall be at all times under the care and inspection of the said President, Fellows, and Overseers, who shall order and appoint the times and places for reading his publick and private lectures ; and see that the Professor duly attend the business of his office, and faithfully discharge the trust aforesaid reposed in him ; and as a regular and faithful discharge thereof will be sufficient to

employ his whole time and thoughts, he shall not, while he holds the said office, be a pastor or teacher of any church or congregation, or an instructor in any other science.

‘That the said Professor hold his office during good behaviour, and that he be removeable from it by the said President, Fellows, and Overseers for want of sufficient ability to execute the trust, or for misbehaviour in the office, or for immoral and scandalous conduct and behaviour out of it.

‘That the Professor on the day of his inauguration, shall in the presence of the President, Fellows, and Overseers of the said College, declare himself to be of the Protestant reformed religion, and a member of a Protestant church, and shall promise to discharge with diligence and fidelity the sacred trust aforesaid reposed in him—that he will endeavour, as well by his example as otherwise, to encourage and promote virtue, true religion and piety ; and that he will religiously observe the aforesaid institutes of the founder of this Professorship.

‘That upon the death or removal of a Professor, the vacancy shall be filled up by the President, Fellows and Overseers, (in the same manner as the former Professor was appointed,) with a person in all respects qualified for the office, and prepared as aforesaid to execute it.

‘Witness our hands and seals this eighteenth day of February, anno domini seventeen hundred and eighty nine.

‘EDMUND TROWBRIDGE, L. S.

‘RICHARD CARY, L. S.

‘Signed sealed and delivered in presence of

‘JOHN FOXCROFT,

‘JAMES FILLEBROWN,

‘and of

‘DAVID DEVENS,

‘SAMUEL CARY,

} by the said Trowbridge.

} by the said Cary.’

The fund thus provided having increased to an amount which, with a certain addition from the college, was deemed sufficient for the object, the Corporation, in the beginning of the present year, with the assent of the Overseers, proceeded to establish the Professor, and elected LEVI FRISBIE, A. M. late Professor of Latin, to enter upon the office with the first college term after commencement. Having accepted his appointment, he was publicly inaugurated the fifth of November. His inaugural address is printed at the request of the Corporation.

JOHN T. KIRKLAND, President.

Harvard University, December 2, 1817.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

IT is well known, that the topics, which fall within the province of this Professorship, are not now for the first time made a part of the instruction in this University. They have always, in connexion with the philosophy of the mind, received their due portion of attention. But the liberality of Mr. Alford has at length enabled the Corporation to divide studies, heretofore united in a single department; a measure which the increased number of our students seems at this time peculiarly to require. Leaving therefore the science of our intellectual nature, a science the most subtle and profound, and which lays the foundation of our speculations in taste as well as morals, to the talents and researches of an experienced and tried Professor, they have assigned natural religion, moral philosophy, and civil polity to a distinct instructor. On this occasion, which introduces that instructor to his office, he has thought that some remarks upon *the necessity, the objects, and influence* of moral philosophy would not be uninteresting or inappropriate.

Moral philosophy in strict propriety is the science of the principles and obligation of duty ; but in the observations I may now make, I shall have reference also to all those studies and inquiries, which have for their object the knowledge and improvement of the moral condition of man.

The doctrine of a moral sense has furnished the first objection to the necessity of moral science. It has often been said, the heart is the best casuist, and its natural promptings the safest guides in duty. But in respect to this objection it must be carefully remembered, that we are not to form our estimate of the value of natural conscience from the prevalent opinions of civilized and christian countries. The moral sense of the most unlearned at the present day is not the sense of nature, but of cultivation ; it has been modified by the studies and experience of ages, and, above all, by the christian religion. It is not denied, that we have from nature a moral as well as an intellectual capacity ; but the former, no less than the latter, is to be improved and enlarged by observation and thought. Many duties arise from relations, which are complicated and remote ; these relations must be investigated and brought together, and general principles, which may be settled into rules, deduced from them. The necessity of this is sufficiently shown by the different and contradictory maxims of duty, that have prevailed in different ages and nations. Were however the original suggestions of uncultivated conscience far clearer and more decisive than experience will

allow us to believe, still the necessity of philosophy would not be superseded. The unremitted labours of the moralist would notwithstanding be required, to relieve the sentiments of mankind, from those associations of prejudice, of fashion, and of false opinion, which have so constant an influence in perverting the judgment and corrupting the heart, and to bring them back to the unbiassed dictates of nature and common sense. Besides, the moral constitution of man, his relations, and duties, are subjects too interesting, and too fruitful of remark, to be neglected in the speculations of the ingenious and inquiring. Erroneous theories will be formed, nay they will be presented to mankind as the rule of life, and even history and fiction be made vehicles of principles, dangerous alike to virtue and to peace. While indeed these speculations of false philosophy are wrapped in metaphysical subtleties, they may excite little alarm, and serve rather to amuse the learned; they are those eccentric lightnings, that play harmlessly in the evening cloud; but when they are made the maxims of common life, or embodied in popular fiction, find their way into the hearts of men, they are these same lightnings concentrated and brought down to earth, blasting and consuming. The safety of society then requires, that such systems be subjected to the jealous scrutiny of a sound philosophy, and that there be men, whose habits and studies will lead them to a rigid superintendence of whatever is proposed;—to give authority to truth, and to detect and expose what is only specious and insinuating. If

our moral being could be left, as it came from the hands of its Creator, to the simple and wholesome viands of nature, if it breathed only the pure atmosphere of truth, it might perhaps preserve the soundness of health, and the ingenuous suffusions of virtue ; but pampered, as it is, with false philosophy and factitious sentiment, the antidote should grow with the poison. There will always be a Hobbes, a Rousseau, or a Godwin ; let us then have also our Cudworths, our Butlers, and our Stewarts.

As a second objection to moral science, it has been asked, do not the scriptures furnish a perfect rule of right ? God hath given us the bible, and what more do we need to guide us to happiness and to heaven ? I answer, the proper exercise in the use of this gift of those powers, which, no less than the bible itself, we have received from his hands. The morality of the scriptures is preceptive and not theoretick ; it enjoins dispositions, without showing their relative subordination, or specifying the actions that flow from them ; it commands duties, but does not teach principles ; nor was it possible, that its precepts, however numerous, should extend to all the variety of daily occurring cases. It is necessary for the christian to analyse the moral rules of his religion, to trace them to their principles, and again from these principles to deduce new rules, and by a knowledge of the reason of each, understand its ever varying accomodation to varying circumstances. Through a neglect of these considerations, what enormities have not been perpetrated by

men with the bible in their hands, from a wrong application of its precepts and examples? It is in this, as in the science of law, innumerable as are the provisions of statutes and cases, still that counsellor would be ill prepared to advise his client, who had not learned to distinguish the principle from the facts, and thus to judge how far the former might be affected by the minutest change in the latter. There is a legal mind, a law logick, more important to the professor than a knowledge of all the precedents in all the books without it.

But while we maintain, that revelation does not supersede the necessity of philosophy, lest we should be misunderstood, it may be proper that we notice more particularly than the subject might seem to require, the unspeakable importance of the aids it affords to the christian moralist, and the strong light it throws over the region of his inquiries.

The bible has taught us the being and attributes of God with a clearness and certainty, to which nature had made but the feeblest approaches; while at the same time, particularly in the new testament, it gives many plain rules in almost every branch of duty. From what a maze of paradox and doubt, in which heathen philosophers were continually bewildered and perplexed, are we now extricated by a few simple and sublime truths? Accordingly, we can scarcely read a page of a christian moralist, but we find him limiting, controlling, or supporting principles, by appeals to the acknowledged doctrines of revealed theol-

ogy ; while the practical rules are so many beacons along the road, to mark his course, and light him on his way. To investigate the principle of an admitted rule is much easier, and followed by conclusions far more satisfactory, than when the principle and the rule are both to be discovered. And when we proceed still further, to trace out new principles and deduce new rules, our inquiries are guided, and our conclusions tried, by truths already known. The parts supplied must be suited to those we possess : as our theories involve consequences, that contradict or harmonize with the plain maxims of the gospel, we know them to be false, or may presume them to be true.

In conformity with these remarks, how different has been the practical application of the same theories, as they have been followed out into their consequences by sceptical or christian moralists. The systems of Godwin and Paley are both founded on the same general principle of utility. This principle leads the author of the Political Justice to consequences, that would sever not only the ties of intimate affection, but the very bonds of social order. These consequences, he who admits the principle, may find it difficult to avoid ; yet the Archdeacon of Carlisle, guided and controled by the doctrines of the bible, connected it with rules of conduct, consistent with the truest reason and purest virtue. Mr. Hume, aware of the cause of such differences, has lamented the unnatural alliance, which in modern times has united theology with

morals ; but he who well considers the exact coincidence of the instructions of Jesus Christ with the deepest principles of our nature and the soundest deductions of philosophy, will find reasons, hardly less impressive, than the miracles themselves, for believing that he was a teacher sent from God, and knew what was in man.

It is in the inducements even more than the rules of duty, that ancient ethicks are deficient. A future state of righteous retribution alone furnishes those sanctions, which can give efficacy to the motives or confidence to the hopes of virtue. How indistinct and unsettled were the notions, and how wavering the belief of the wisest heathen sages upon this subject, is well known to every classical scholar. In the Offices of Cicero, the purest and most complete of the ancient compendiums of duty, and which, more than any of his philosophical writings, displays the man rather than the academician, the anxious father can find no higher obligation to virtue, to urge upon his son, than the sentiment of his own conscious mind. But what to him was scarcely hope, to us is confidence. Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel.

The *objects of moral science* are implied, in what we have said of its *necessity*. They are to preserve from neglect or perversion the knowledge, we already possess, to enlarge its boundaries, and strengthen its foundations, by new or clearer views of the nature and relations of man, and above all, to give it a prac-

tical influence upon the character and prospects of society. That the rules of duty should ever be made so simple or so particular, as in no case to be mistaken, is not to be expected, perhaps not to be desired, since much of our discipline consists in our doubts. But moral knowledge cannot yet be supposed to have reached its limits. There are unexplored avenues before us, and gleams of light invite us onward. No theory of morals has as yet received a general, much less a universal assent; and of practical principles how many are obscured by doubt, and embarrassed by objections? When does luxury become vice, and how far may we innocently use, what the many will abuse? Questions, like these, are of daily occurrence and momentous importance. The scrupulously conscientious may be safe, for they will forbear, when they are not certain they are right; but the multitude only, when they are not certain they are wrong.

In the relations of states, of rulers and subjects, the principles of morality and rules of conduct are still more indefinite and unsettled. That the law of nations is but the extension of those maxims of equity and kindness, which should regulate the intercourse of individuals, till of late, seems, in practice at least, hardly to have been conceived. Expediency rather than right has been the great spring of political motion, and diplomacy but another name for intrigue and duplicity. The representative, in his seat, will advocate with his voice, and support with his vote, measures, which the man, in the relations of private life

would blush to acknowledge. Nor is this want of just sensibility confined to the statesman ; with the citizen, to defraud the publick is too often but an achievement of ingenuity ; and even the scholar in his closet, while he kindles with indignation at the injustice or cruelty of an individual, reads the aggressions and ravages of nations with hardly a sentiment, that they are crimes.

Here then is much to be done ; and there is also somewhat to encourage exertion. On these subjects are not juster views beginning to make their way ? Negotiations are professed to be conducted more in the honourable spirit of frankness and conciliation. The laws, if not the practice, of civilized war have been softened into comparative mildness. Questions of national interest are debated, and the measures of governments examined, upon the broad basis of equity and truth, and statesmen compelled, if not to adopt, certainly to defend their plans of policy, not by reasons of state, but reasons of right. If all this be in pretence, more than in truth, still the necessity of hypocrisy is one proof of the existence of virtue. If the splendid pall be thrown over the bier, it is because men cannot bear the ghastliness of death.

But it is necessary to consider well in what manner the objects we have mentioned, are most successfully to be pursued. He who would advance the improvement of individuals and nations, must not be too exclusively occupied with metaphysical subtleties, and abstract reasonings. To distinguish the original laws

of our nature from the judgments founded upon education, custom and habit, is the great difficulty, that meets us at every turn, and embarrasses every step of our moral inquiries. This difficulty can be surmounted only by a close attention to the phenomena of our active powers. The philosopher must investigate and teach the moral constitution of man, must study him in the infancy as well as the mature development of his faculties, and show by what motives, associations and influences, his character and conduct may be formed to the desired result. Thus alone will he be able to loosen the primitive principles of truth from what is adventitious, and make a successful application of his discoveries to the interesting purpose of moral education. The grand outlines of duty are in a good degree known and admitted. There is the great road, which all allow to be the highway of virtue ; but the thousand avenues, that lead to it, the thousand devious paths, that imperceptibly diverge from it, these are to be explored, their direction ascertained, and clearly pointed out. In doing this, it will be necessary to bring frequently into notice many truths, which are only assented to, or not contradicted, and to give them a prominent and palpable form ; so that no one can violate or disregard them without being conscious himself and shewing to others, that he does so. These relate to a numerous class of actions, whose effects are rather indirect than immediate, and which yet have a most important influence, in giving a first impulse and di-

rection to the thoughts, and a cast to the feelings. They do not so much indicate a settled depravity of motive, as an insensibility to the nicer shades of moral distinction, and an indifference to consequences, which are rather probable than certain. In such cases little compunction is felt, not merely because they are countenanced by publick opinion, but because the individual does not distinctly present to his own mind truths, of which he is not however wholly unaware.

Having thus spoken of the *necessity* and *objects* of moral philosophy ; we proceed to notice some circumstances of its *practical influence*. And here we would observe, that although knowledge is not virtue, yet to enlighten the conscience is in itself an important means of improving the heart. Wrong actions, even with a good intention, have an effect beyond the immediate evil they produce, dangerous to the virtue not only of the agent, but of others. He, who thinks persecution or cruelty, his duty, cannot practise them, without having his bad passions called forth, and his heart hardened. Every error in conduct, as well as speculation, carries him further from virtue and truth, and he is less likely, at each step, to act rightly or think correctly. Degraded prejudices or narrow views are sometimes so mingled with the best dispositions, that the natural tendencies of virtue are checked, its beauty tarnished, and influence perverted ; while as the views are corrected and enlarged, its efforts are facilitated, its charms acknowledged, and its example commanding.

But is there not in these studies a direct tendency not merely to enlighten the conscience, but to form and cherish that moral sensibility, which is at once the active spring and jealous guardian of virtue? The first influence of this kind, we shall notice, is upon those engaged in such inquiries. Truths which are frequently presented to the mind, can hardly fail, imperceptibly perhaps, to produce some effect upon it. But when these truths are the subjects of personal speculation, when their character, relations and practical consequences are the constant topicks of study and interest, this effect must be greatly increased. A disposition to consider our own pursuits and discoveries, as all important to society, and sometimes to make the most incongruous application of them, has often given just occasion to the wit of the satirist. The poem is well enough, said the mathematician; but I do not see, that it proves any thing. The chemist and physical philosopher are deeply interested in the application of their principles to the arts; and will not the same law of our nature operate in moral speculations? Can he rest at ease, whose conduct is constantly at variance with the principles he is labouring to establish, and the rules he is forming for others? Will he not rather, if he cannot suit his life to his theory, accommodate his theory to his life? Thus Rousseau substituted sentiment for virtue; and the profligacy of his manners was at once the cause and the effect of the profligacy of his writings. I am unwilling to think that one can have

the beauty of moral order, and the indications of moral design, constantly in view, without having his feelings touched and his heart made better. Can you breathe the pure mountain air, and not be refreshed? Can you walk forth amidst the beautiful and grand of the works of God, and feel no kindling of devotion?

If the effect, we have described, be natural, it cannot be confined to the philosopher alone; it will extend itself in his instructions and writings. The same views will be gradually applied in the formation of the dispositions and habits of children; they will become an important branch of liberal knowledge, and thus exert a control over the higher classes of society, over men of letters and the popular authors of the day.

This suggests to us another means of practical influence. Those compositions in poetry and prose, which constitute the literature of a nation, the essay, the drama, the novel, it cannot be doubted, have a most extensive and powerful operation upon the moral feelings and character of the age. The very business of the authors of such works is directly or indirectly with the heart. Even descriptions of natural scenery owe much of their beauty and interest to the moral associations they awaken. In like manner fine turns of expression or thought often operate more by suggestion than enumeration. But when feelings and passions are directly described, or embodied in the hero and called forth by the incidents of a story, it is

then, that the magick of fiction and poetry is complete, that they enter in and dwell in the secret chambers of the very soul, moulding it at will. In these moments of deep excitement, must not a bias be given to the character, and much be done to elevate and refine, or degrade and pollute, those sympathies and sentiments, which are the sources of much of our virtue and happiness, or our guilt and misery? The danger is that, in such cases, we do not discriminate the distinct action of associated causes. Even in what is presented to the senses, we are aware of the power of habitual combination. An object naturally disagreeable, becomes beautiful, because we have often seen the sun shine or the dew sparkle upon it, or it has been grouped in a scene of peculiar interest. Thus the powers of fancy and of taste blend associations in the mind, which disguise the original nature of moral qualities. A liberal generosity, a disinterested self devotion, a powerful energy or deep sensibility of soul, a contempt of danger and death are often so connected in story with the most profligate principles and manners, that the latter are excused and even sanctified by the former.* The impression, which so powerfully seizes all the sympathies, is one; and the ardent youth becomes almost ambitious of a character, he ought to abhor. So too sentiments, from which in their plain form delicacy would revolt, are insinuated with the charms of poetical imagery and expression; and even the coarseness of Fielding is probably less pernicious than the seducing refine-

* See note at the end of the address.

ment of writers like Moore ; whose voluptuous sensibility steals upon the heart and corrupts its purity, as the moon beams, in some climates, are believed to poison the substances, on which they fall.

But in no productions of modern genius is the reciprocal influence of morals and literature more distinctly seen, than in those of the author of *Childe Harold*. His character produced the poems, and it cannot be doubted, that his poems are adapted to produce such a character. His heroes speak a language, supplied not more by imagination, than consciousness. They are not those machines, that, by a contrivance of the artist, send forth a musick of their own ; but instruments, through which he breathes his very soul, in tones of agonized sensibility, that cannot but give a sympathetick impulse to those who hear. The desolate misanthropy of his mind rises and throws its dark shade over his poetry, like one of his own ruined castles ; we feel it to be sublime, but we forget, that it is a sublimity it cannot have, till it is abandoned by every thing, that is kind and peaceful and happy, and its halls are ready to become the haunts of outlaws and assassins. Nor are his more tender and affectionate passages those, to which we can yield ourselves without a feeling of uneasiness. It is not that we can here and there select a proposition formally false or pernicious ; but that he leaves an impression unfavourable to a healthful state of thought and feeling, peculiarly dangerous to the finest minds and

most susceptible hearts. They are the scene of a summer evening, where all is tender and beautiful and grand ; but the damps of disease descend with the dews of heaven, and the pestilent vapours of night are breathed in with the fragrance and balm, and the delicate and fair are the surest victims of the exposure.

Although I have illustrated the moral influence of literature, principally from its mischiefs ; yet it is obvious, if what I have said be just, it may be rendered no less powerful, as a means of good. Is it not true that within the last century a decided and important improvement in the moral character of our literature has taken place ; and, had Pope and Smollet written at the present day, would the former have published the imitations of Chaucer, or the latter the adventures of Pickle and Random ? Genius cannot now sanctify impurity or want of principle ; and our criticks and reviewers are exercising jurisdiction not only upon the literary but moral blemishes of the authors, that come before them. We notice with peculiar pleasure the sentence of just indignation, which the Edinburgh tribunal has pronounced upon Moore, Swift, Goethe, and in general the German sentimentalists. Indeed the fountains of literature into which an enemy has sometimes infused poison, naturally flow with refreshment and health. Cowper and Campbell have led the muses to repose in the bowers of religion and virtue ; and Miss Edgeworth has

so cautiously combined the features of her characters, that the predominant expression is ever what it should be ; she has shown us, not vices ennobled by virtues, but virtues, degraded and perverted by their union with vices. The success of this lady has been great, but had she availed herself more of the motives and sentiments of religion, we think it would have been greater. She has stretched forth a powerful hand to the impotent in virtue ; and had she added, with the apostle, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, we should almost have expected miracles from its touch.

The incorporating of religion with morality, we mention in the last place, as a means of practical influence. Those, we have hitherto noticed, have a more particular reference to the higher and intellectual classes ; but this extends to every order in society. It is not the fountain, which plays only in the gardens of the palace, but the rain of heaven, which descends alike upon the enclosures of the rich and the poor, and refreshes the meanest shrub, no less than the fairest flower. The sages of antiquity seem to have believed, that morality had nothing to do with religion ; and christians of the middle age, that religion had nothing to do with morality ; but, at the present day, we acknowledge how intimate and important is their connexion. It is not views of moral fitness, by which the minds of men are at first to be affected, but by connecting their duties with the feelings and motives, the hopes and fears of christianity.

Both are necessary, the latter to prompt and invigorate virtue, the former to give it the beauty of knowledge and taste. It is heat, that causes the germ to spring and flourish in the heart ; but it is light, that imparts verdure to its foliage, and their hues to its flowers.

Thus I have spoken, not as I could have wished, but as I was able, of the necessity, the objects, and influence of the studies of the moralist. I am aware of objections to much that I have said, which I have omitted to notice, not because they were unimportant, but from want of time for their discussion. The idea of perfectibility has been considered as the dream of the visionary ; but it does not follow, that because every thing is not to be hoped, therefore nothing is to be attempted. Man has certainly capacities of improvement, and he can feel a moral influence ; his progress may be fluctuating and slow ; but, from the application of judicious and unremitting efforts, will it not be certain ? Commencing with those, who labour to unfold the principles and ends of moral action, may it not be expected to descend, as we have said, through the higher and more intellectual classes of society, till it reaches and purifies and ennobles the great mass of mankind in the humblest walks of life ; as the blood, flowing from the heart and distributed through the larger arteries, finds its way at length into the capillary and minuter vessels, where it is incorporated with the very substance of the body, giving health and vigour

and beauty. Let us then close, by accommodating to our subject the words of Quintilian concerning eloquence, “*Nam est certe aliquid consummata virtus* neque ad eam pervenire natura humani ingenii prohibet ; quod si non contingat, altius tamen ibunt, qui ad summa nitentur.*”

* Eloquentia.

Note, Page 22.

THE great mischief, which I believe has arisen to the cause of morality from the source, I have mentioned, induces me to subjoin in a note some notice of an objection, which I am aware may be made to what I have said. It may be asked, are not such qualities found combined in real life ; and is it not the legitimate province of fiction to represent all the variety of human characters, as experience has shown them ? To this I answer. If the combinations, I have censured, were in truth presented to us in our intercourse with society, still it would not be necessary for the purposes of interesting fiction, to give them to us heightened and coloured, as they often are, by all the powers of genius and fancy. The end of such compositions is to amuse and instruct. These ends may be attained, and the whole store of human feelings and passions, virtues and vices exhibited, in a manner the most impressive, without such a union, as to neutralize or change their just and proper character and effect. There are poisons in nature, and some too which might impart a new flavour and relish to food ; yet who would, for this reason, mingle them in the viands, which he offers to his friend. The painter or poet in his delineations of the scenes of nature does not think himself obliged, to copy those deformities, which would disfigure his piece and impair its effect. He may select and combine anew, and still be considered as faithful to his grand original, if it furnish all the elements of his picture. In like manner the moral painter, while the features of his characters are such, as are not inconsistent in themselves, and may be easily conceived to be united in life, has all the truth, which his object requires, and a variety of materials, sufficiently copious and powerful for the highest efforts of genius. But the supposed fact, on which the objection is grounded, does not appear to me supported by experience. If unprincipled or profligate men are sometimes found possessed of qualities, which, on a slight acquaintance, ren-

der them interesting and amiable, yet, on a more intimate knowledge, some secret meanness, some deep taint of selfishness, or coarseness of feeling will generally be discovered. to tarnish all that seemed fair, to offend the taste, and separate from their sympathy and communion the truly virtuous and refined. Shakspeare is the acknowledged painter of nature ; and although he is often vulgar and indecent, the fault of the age not less than of the man, I cannot now call to mind a single character, among the great variety he has drawn, whose tendency is, to render vice lovely, or virtue repulsive. Compare the Iago of this poet with the Zanga of Young. In their general design there is a resemblance ; but, while Iago is as hateful, as he is wicked, there is in Zanga a tenderness and elevation, which shed a splendour even upon a revenge the most malignant. Indeed are not beings like Zanga or the Corsair creatures, not of nature, but of fancy ; and do we not find, that in fact any one habit of mind or conduct, radically inconsistent with a principle of universal virtue, will at length pervert the whole man, and spread its polluting influence over whatever was originally great or excellent ?